AFRICA RENEWAL

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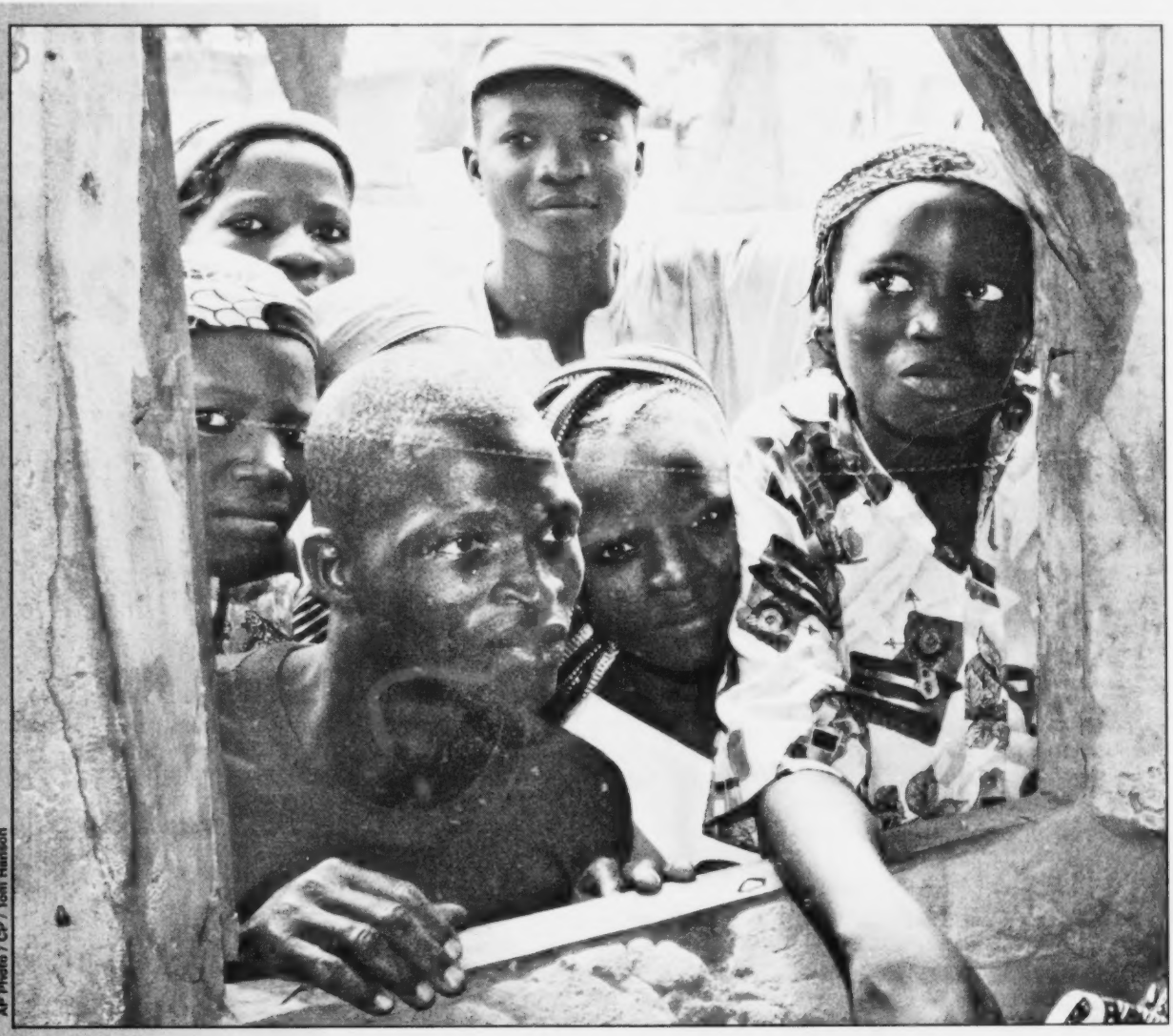

AP Photo / CP / Tom Hanson

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Combating Africa's 'silent tsunamis'

Donor momentum builds for greater aid to the continent

By **Ernest Harsch**

After a decade of decline in aid flows to Africa, the tide seems to be turning. According to UN estimates, $23.1 bn in official development assistance (ODA) went to the continent in 2003, a striking 46 per cent more than just three years earlier (see graph). All indications point to even higher levels in 2004 and 2005.

Yet this is no reason for complacency, French President Jacques Chirac told the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in late January. Africa and other developing regions, he said, are suffering chronic "silent tsunamis" that claim untold numbers of lives through famine, infectious diseases and violence.

If Africa is to reduce its high poverty rates, it needs substantially more assistance — in fact, a doubling of aid over the next decade. With the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD), Mr. Chirac told the gathering of world political and corporate leaders, "Africa has begun to change. . . . The financial community must show massive commitment in return."

Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo, speaking on behalf of several African presidents who took part in the Davos forum, noted that African leaders have shown through their own efforts that "we want to help ourselves." But until the continent is able to revive its economies and earn more from its exports, there will not be enough financing to deal with its lack of food, jobs, schools and health care. "We are not getting the critical mass of funds to make development possible."

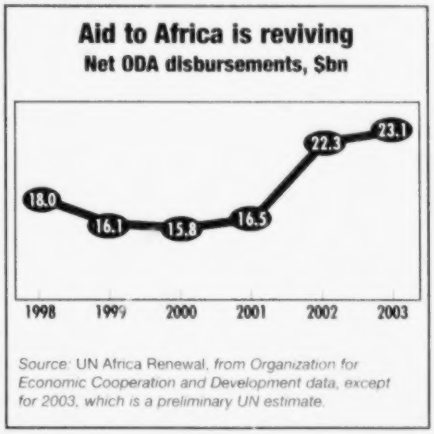
Diversion or opportunity?

For some, the tsunami that devastated Indonesia, Sri Lanka and other countries bordering the Indian Ocean in late December seemed like another occasion for aid to be "diverted" from Africa, as countries around the world rushed to provide relief to the disaster's many victims.

The daily *Le Pays* of Burkina Faso wondered whether Asia's geostrategic importance to the West accounted for the large contributions pledged to Asian tsunami victims — while Somalia, Kenya and other African coastal countries that were also hit were "totally ignored."

Providing evidence for this view, the UN's World Food Programme reported that donations to its operations in Africa dropped by 21 per cent in January 2005, compared with the same month the year before. Mr. Jan Egeland, the UN's emergency relief coordinator, described Africa's predicament to the Security Council as "a forgotten and neglected quadruple tsunami" of disease, conflict, poor governance and chronic food shortages. "Africa should have the same worth as the tsunami-affected region," he said, but actual humanitarian assistance is falling far short of the needs in countries such as Sudan, Congo, Ethiopia, Somalia, Chad and Zimbabwe.

Such warnings prompted some relief officials to promise that they will try to keep a spotlight on Africa. "Not one euro destined for Africa will be diverted to South Asia," pledged Mr. Louis Michel, the European Union's commissioner for development and humanitarian action.

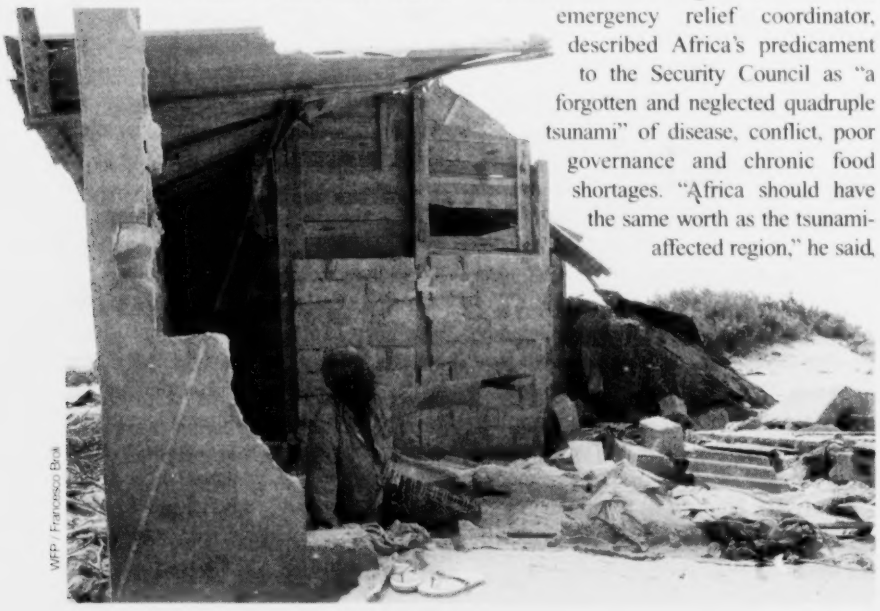


Source: UN Africa Renewal, *from Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development data, except for 2003, which is a preliminary UN estimate.*

Whatever the immediate impact on limited relief budgets, the extremely generous and rapid response to the tsunami by governments and citizens in the richest countries demonstrated the longer-term possibilities for renewed aid flows.

"The rich countries are capable, when they want to, of mounting an extraordinary response to the needs of the poor, in no time at all," commented Prof. Jeffrey Sachs, who heads the UN Millennium Project. "The tsunami has changed our mode of calculation."

For proponents of African development, the challenge now appears to be tapping into this potential for international solidarity — and to do so in a sustained fashion that looks beyond short-term emergencies towards the continent's basic development needs.



WFP / Francesco Bini

A house destroyed by the tsunami in Somalia: Very little relief has gone to Africa's tsunami victims.

Impetus in Davos

The Davos gathering confirmed that some of the world's major donors are thinking more seriously about ways to boost their aid disbursements to Africa. Moreover, this emphasis on renewed aid comes at the same time that creditor nations and institutions are acknowledging that the world's poorest countries need more sweeping debt relief (see page 5).

At the opening of the World Economic Forum, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair reaffirmed that Africa and climate change will be the two issues on which his government will focus this year during its presidency of the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialized countries. The UK has supported calls for aid to Africa to be doubled.

But aid and debt relief alone are not sufficient, Mr. Blair acknowledged. Africa also must be able to earn more from its own exports. Towards that end, he said, "we must open our markets, cut our subsidies, including on controversial items such as cotton and sugar," and help African countries build their capacity to manage trade reforms.

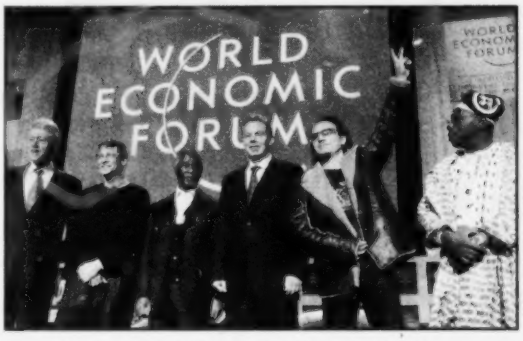
In 2004 Mr. Blair appointed a Commission for Africa, half of whose members are African. Released on 11 March, its report called for both increased aid flows and measures to strengthen the capacity of African democracies and institutions.

Targeting the MDGs

Prime Minister Blair and other Davos participants set their proposals within the framework of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which include halving the number of people living in extreme poverty by 2015. "A new global vision of development is required," based on the idea of partnership exemplified by the MDGs and NEPAD, said President Chirac.

Just a little more than a week before the Davos gathering, the UN Millennium Project issued an extensive report, *Investing in Development*, that urged a doubling of aid to the poorest countries. It also detailed practical steps for advancing some of the specific MDGs in Africa, such as providing inexpensive insecticide-treated bed nets to drastically reduce child mortality from malaria.

Such ideas were welcomed not only by the political leaders at Davos, but also by many corporate executives. Mr. Bill Gates, head of the US computer software giant Microsoft, noted that millions of children in Africa are dying of treatable diseases. "The fact that we don't apply the resources to the known cures or to finding better cures is really . . . the most scandalous issue of our time." His own foundation has already pledged $750 mn for child immunization programmes in developing countries.



World Economic Forum / Swiss Image.ch / Remy Steinegger

At Davos (from left): former US President Bill Clinton, Microsoft head Bill Gates, South African President Thabo Mbeki, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair, Irish rock star Bono, Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo.

G-8 proposals

Individual contributions, even from some of the world's richest people, can only go a small way towards meeting Africa's enormous financing needs. To discuss methods of bridging the gap, the finance ministers of the seven largest Western powers met in London a week later. The proposals they examined included:

- The establishment of an International Financing Facility, put forward by UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown as one means of raising funds for a new "Marshall Plan" for poor countries. Under the scheme, donor governments would raise money in international financial markets by floating bonds backed by promises of future aid.
- A similar, but less ambitious, "experimental" facility, also suggested by the UK, devoted to developing vaccines against HIV/AIDS and other diseases.
- A variety of new taxes, proposed by France, to raise revenues for development assistance. Suggestions included a modest tax on international financial transactions, a tax on aviation fuel (which is currently untaxed) and a levy of about $1 on each air ticket sold. The latter step, President Chirac noted, would by itself raise an additional $3 bn annually.

With some countries, including the US and Japan, expressing reservations about some of these proposals, the finance ministers did not reach agreement. They did decide, however, to continue the discussions at the next G-8 summit, set for July in the UK.

Not just more, but better

Commenting on the proposals for doubling aid to Africa, Mr. Paolo de Renzio, a research fellow at the Overseas Development Institute of the UK's University of Sussex, points out that accompanying steps will also be needed to ensure that the aid is effective. In part, this should entail helping African countries build up their institutional capacity to manage aid. Donors themselves must also coordinate their own interventions and practices much better, he says.

In February, UN Economic Commission for Africa Executive Director K.Y. Amoako said that the Commission for Africa (of which he is a member) is calling for increasing not only the quantity of aid to Africa, but also "the quality and the whole aid relationship." Between aid recipients and donors, he said, there must be "mutual accountability."

Some representatives of non-governmental organizations add that donor countries should stop dictating policies to Africa. "The practice of attaching a raft of economic policy conditions to aid and debt relief, including privatization, trade liberalization and government spending cuts, must end," says Ms. Romilly Greenhill, a policy officer at the UK-based ActionAid. ■

New urgency for cancelling Africa's debt

G-8 powers consider full write-off of multilateral obligations

By **Gumisai Mutume**

There is growing optimism that 2005 may prove a watershed year in the drive to cancel much of Africa's foreign debt, a notion inconceivable two decades ago when the global anti-debt movement took off. "We are encouraged," civil society groups declared at an African Social Forum in Lusaka, Zambia, in December, "that after many years of half-measures, full cancellation is being discussed" at the level of the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialized countries, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank.

Optimism has been buoyed by other developments, such as an agreement to cancel a significant amount of Iraq's debt, growing demands from African leaders for a solution and announcements by the UK (chair of the G-8 in 2005) that it supports 100 per cent cancellation.

"There's a growing consensus that the next step is [to provide] up to 100 per cent debt relief," says Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown.

At a G-8 finance ministers meeting in February, the world's richest nations agreed in principle to cancel up to 100 per cent of the debts of the poorest countries. Mr Brown has proposed that rich countries put up money to pay off the debts of African countries to the World Bank and IMF and that the vast gold reserves held by the IMF be sold to finance debt relief. However, the major donor nations still do not agree on how best to provide debt relief.

Mr. Brown also announced that his country would pay off 10 per cent of the money owed by 32 of the world's poorest countries to the World Bank and the African Development Bank. The goal would be to free them from the "shackles of debt." The move, worth £100 mn a year until 2015, is expected to put pressure on the US, Germany and Japan to follow suit.

The Mali branch of the anti-debt coalition Jubilee 2000 held a conference in Siby in 2002, part of a growing international campaign for debt cancellation.

AFP (Jerry Penacoli, World Bank Group)

No to HIPC

The meeting of civil society groups at the African Social Forum rejected any further attempts to work out a formula under the current Heavily Indebted Poor Countries initiative (HIPC). That plan was launched in 1996 to reduce the debt of 41 countries (34 of them African) to levels deemed "affordable." But for impoverished nations "struggling to meet the human needs of their people, full 100 per cent multilateral debt cancellation is the only option," the groups said. They urged creditor nations to drop conditions that have accompanied debt relief packages, such as privatization and trade liberalization, because these "have devastated our economies long enough."

HIPC was designed by the World Bank and IMF to eliminate $100 bn of the debt owed by the poorest countries to multilateral lenders. The plan was to reduce the debt of eligible countries to "sustainable" levels — defined as no more than 150 per cent of the value of annual exports. By the Bank's reckoning, a country with a ratio lower than 150 per cent earns enough export revenue to service its debt.

But after eight years of HIPC, there is a general consensus that the plan has provided too little relief to too few countries. So far about a third of the debt has been cancelled, but some estimates suggest that HIPC countries still have about $90 bn in debt stock.

A recent study by the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) shows that countries that have received HIPC relief will actually see their repayments increase from $2.4 bn in 2003 to $2.6 bn this year, partly because of the way the amount of debt relief is calculated under HIPC. Initially there is a substantial lowering of debt but obligations increase again as new money is borrowed to service old debt and pay for basic development programmes.

UNCTAD says that the projected export earnings used to calculate sustainable debt under HIPC are overly optimistic. It estimates that many of the 23 African countries that reached the qualification stage of the programme in 2003 will not, as envisioned under the plan, attain sustainable debt levels by 2020.

Increasingly, the Bank and IMF are acknowledging some of the shortcomings of HIPC. In 1999 they attempted to revamp the plan by launching on enhanced HIPC — to allow more countries to qualify and to accelerate delivery.

Debate shifts

Over the years, the debate about debt alleviation has shifted, albeit slowly, and now practically all industrialized nations agree on the need for relief. But disagreement remains on how to achieve it. Some favour a phased approach with stringent conditions, as envisaged through HIPC. Others call for a full, unconditional write-off.

It is generally accepted that Africa's debt is too high to afford. As a proportion of gross domestic product and of export earnings, Africa's debt of about $350 bn is the highest of any developing region. The high debt levels impede public investment in infrastructure and human development and this in turn deters private investment.

For impoverished nations "struggling to meet the human needs of their people, full 100 per cent multilateral debt cancellation is the only option."

— African Social Forum, December 2004

"Africa needs more financing, and that goes beyond traditional debt reduction. What is needed is full debt cancellation and at the same time a substantial increase in public development aid," says Mr. Alpha Oumar Konaré, head of the executive body of the African Union. "Africa today needs new resources that cannot be provided any longer according to the old recipes . . . we have to put an end to head-in-the-sand policies and grasp the need for new ways of debt management."

Resistance to debt relief

Both the World Bank and IMF remain opposed to calls to totally cancel the debt owed to them by the poorest countries. World Bank President James Wolfensohn argues that such a decision can only be taken by rich country governments, which are the institutions' largest shareholders.

The position of the IMF has generally been that debts are obligations that must be honoured. The IMF also contends that cancelling debt could encourage wealthy countries to stop lending and cut aid budgets further. The World Bank has opposed writing off the debts on its books because of the potential damage this could have on its credit rating. Debt write-offs would imply an acknowledgment that the Bank had made mistakes in lending.

The institutions say full cancellation would not work because there are no guarantees that the money saved would reach the intended target, poor people. In a policy paper, the IMF argues that unconditional cancellation raises the risk that debt relief could be squandered through corruption, increased military expenditure, or grandiose projects.

Australian Prime Minister John Howard concurs: "There is no guarantee that if you do it, what is forgiven or what is the subject of a moratorium will end up going in as aid, because the debts are not normally owed by people who need the assistance." Often the debts are "owed by other organizations and you have no guarantee that if you provide a debt moratorium or debt forgiveness that that money ends up where it should."

Some of those opposed to full cancellation have also often argued that it creates a "moral hazard" — in other words, it would promote risky behaviour by leading borrowers to believe they will be bailed out even if they do not pursue "good policies." The World Bank says that many countries that are highly indebted became so partly due to their inability to manage their financial resources. In contrast, the so-called tiger economies of East Asia, China and India implemented sound policies, using their borrowings to dramatically reduce poverty.

Iraq impetus

At the end of last year, industrial nations, at US urging, announced that they would cancel a sizeable part of the debt owed to them by Iraq. The country owes $40 bn to the Paris Club, an informal grouping of mainly Western creditor nations. The sum represents about a third of Iraq's external debt. The new Paris Club deal recommends an eventual reduction of 80 per cent of the debt owed to its members, leaving an outstanding debt of $8 bn.

Some groups have been quick to seize on Iraq's example to press for similar treatment of other developing countries. "Just as America is arguing in Iraq, debt forgiveness is vital in bringing stability to war-wracked countries and in preventing renewed conflict," says Mr. Alan Whaites, World Vision's director of international policy. The faith-based non-governmental organization has produced a report showing that the total debt of the 16 countries worst hit by recent conflict could be cancelled at a cost of $84 bn.

Eight of the countries are in sub-Saharan Africa, including the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Sudan. "Without debt relief," says Mr. Whaites, "these countries will remain shackled to the constraints of post-conflict economic stagnation without the means to rise to viability."

The US championed the call to assist Iraq because, it said, the country accrued its debt under a brutal dictatorship, and Iraqis deserve a fresh start. In response, World Bank President Wolfensohn commented: "In the light of the debt relief initiative for Iraq, a lot of countries are saying 'we also had debts assumed by people that shouldn't have assumed them.' They are saying that 'if debt relief is happening for Iraq, it should be happening for us too.'"

Rechanneling money

Columbia University Prof. Jeffrey Sachs says it is "unconscionable" for the Paris Club to grant a large write-off to Iraq without extending the same relief to countries such as Nigeria, a heavily indebted emerging democracy. Much of Nigeria's debt was also accrued under dictatorships, a large proportion of its population lives in poverty and the country's oil revenues per head are only a fraction of Iraq's. Nigeria, like a growing number of countries in Africa, is also bearing the brunt of an HIV/AIDS epidemic that, unchecked, could set the country back many years in terms of human development.

"While impoverished countries struggle to cope with the HIV/AIDS crisis, the World Bank and IMF continue to insist that they prioritize debt repayments over spending on HIV/AIDS programs and health care," says Ms. Jakeya Caruthers of the anti-debt group Jubilee USA. She says donor-driven policies that require cuts in state spending, privatization of public

services and removal of subsidies have rendered governments incapable of providing affordable social services to poor people. Such policies, coupled with debt servicing, "cripple the ability of African countries to respond to HIV/AIDS," she says. "We demand that they drop the debt now to fight HIV/AIDS."

Ms. Caruthers was part of a group of women and girls who, on World AIDS Day, demonstrated in front of the World Bank and IMF offices in Washington, DC. Dressed in red, they created a human chain in the form of a women's symbol to dramatize the disproportionate impact of HIV/AIDS on women globally. In Africa, almost 60 per cent of those living with HIV/AIDS are women. The protesters demanded that the money poor countries are spending on debt should be rechannelled towards health, education and the fight against HIV/AIDS.

By September 2004, Jubilee USA had sent more than 600 faxes to the US Treasury and 11,000 cards to the World Bank and IMF. It also delivered to the G-8 a letter calling for debt relief from more than 250 prominent religious leaders.

Refuse to pay

Mr. Sachs has encouraged African countries to consider simply refusing to service their debts unless creditor nations cancel them. "The creditors ought to do this, on the basis of their long-standing commitments," Mr. Sachs, a special adviser to the UN Secretary-General, told African presidents attending a conference on hunger in Addis Ababa last July.

If creditors do not write off the debt, says Mr. Sachs, Africa will be forced to choose: "Should it save its dying children or should it pay its debts? I say it should save its children. Unilateral debt repudiation is preferable to death by debt." He says African countries that stop debt servicing should keep careful and transparent records showing that the money is being used for urgent public needs such as health care.

The Zimbabwe-based non-governmental group African Forum and Network on Debt and Development (AFRODAD), says African countries should refuse to service their debt for several reasons:

- Much of the debt is "odious" — it accrues from loans taken out by corrupt or dictatorial regimes such as South Africa's apartheid government and Zaire's government under the late President Mobutu Sese Seko.
- The amounts due have swelled to unsustainable levels due to high interest rates and unfair trade terms for goods produced by African countries.
- Debt that cannot be serviced without impoverishing a nation's people should be considered "immoral debt" and should not be paid.
- Some of the debt has been left as a result of poorly designed reform programmes under the guidance of creditors, including the structural adjustment programmes of the World Bank and IMF.

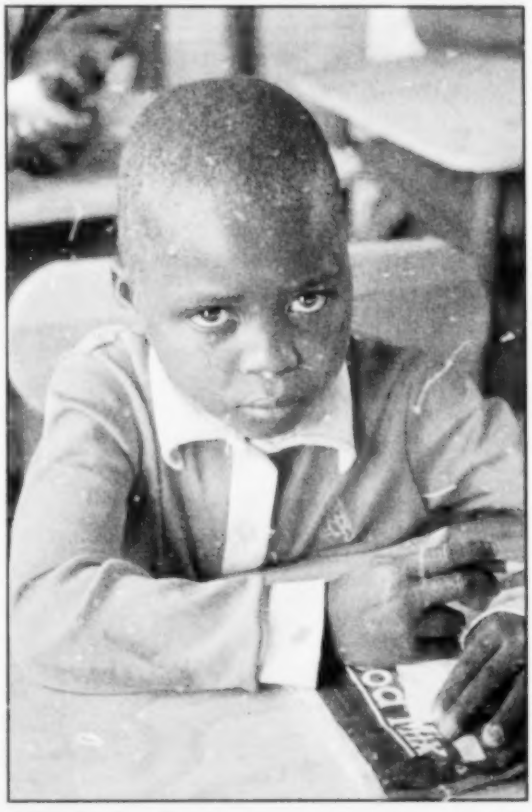
AFRODAD reports that even after receiving HIPC relief, African governments still spend, on average, $14 per person a year on debt payments, compared with $5 per person on health.

Hindrance to development

Adding its voice to the debate, UNCTAD released a report in September urging creditor nations to write off the debt owed by poor African countries. The report, *Economic Development in Africa — Debt Sustainability: Oasis or Mirage*, noted that continued debt servicing is limiting the ability of these countries to attain the internationally agreed targets known as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), which include reducing poverty by half by 2015.

"Debt servicing at any level is incompatible with attaining the MDGs in many African countries," UNCTAD reported. For Africa to achieve the MDGs, "at the very least, growth levels will have to double to some 7 to 8 per cent per annum for the next decade, the financial requirements of which are incompatible with present and projected levels of debt servicing."

Between 1970 and 2002 sub-Saharan Africa received $294 bn in total disbursements from the North and paid back $268 bn in debt servicing alone. Debt servicing by African countries constitutes "a reverse transfer of resources to creditors by a group of countries that can least afford this," UNCTAD reports.



Do African countries have to choose between servicing their foreign debts and putting more money into education?

The UN agency notes that even a full write-off would not be enough to attain the MDGs, but at least it would be a first step towards restoring economic growth in many African countries.

Mr. Brown, the UK's chancellor of the exchequer, concurs. "Too many countries are still being forced to choose between servicing their debts and making the investments in health, education and infrastructure that would allow them to achieve the Millennium Development Goals," he says. "We must do more." ■

Global AIDS treatment drive takes off

Rapid increase in number of people receiving ARV medicines

By **Michael Fleshman**

When a reporter first met seven-year-old Bongani in a hardscrabble shantytown near Johannesburg in 2003, it was evident the child was dying. He was too weak for school, stunted and racked by diarrhoea. There was little question that he, like his deceased parents, was infected with the human immunodeficiency virus that causes AIDS. It seemed equally certain that he would soon lie in a tiny grave next to theirs — joining the 370,000 South Africans who died from the disease that year.

AFRAS Photo / Eric Miller

A couple receives ARV medications in Cape Town, South Africa.

But when the journalist, Mr. Martin Plaut of the BBC, returned a year later, he found a healthy, laughing Bongani poring over his lesson book. "The transformation," Mr. Plaut wrote last December, "was remarkable."

That transformation — and the difference between life and death for Bongani and a growing number of people living with HIV and AIDS in Africa — has resulted from access to anti-retroviral drugs (ARVs) that attack the virus and can dramatically reduce AIDS deaths. For years high costs severely limited their use in Africa. The Joint UN Programme on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimated that only about 50,000 of the 4 million Africans in urgent need of the drugs were able to obtain them in 2002. But with prices dropping in the face of demands for treatment access and competition from generic copies of the patented medications, the politics and economics of AIDS treatment have finally begun to shift.

In December 2003, the World Health Organization (WHO) announced an unprecedented drive to put 3 million people living with HIV/AIDS in developing countries on ARV treatment by the end of 2005, the "3x5" campaign. Two months later, the US launched an ambitious programme of its own, the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) — a 5-year, $15 bn initiative to provide ARV therapy to 2 million people and prevent 7 million new infections by 2008 in 15 countries, including 12 in Africa.

'Irresponsible' goal now in sight

The early results are encouraging. In January 2005, WHO, joined by representatives of the US government, UNAIDS and the multilateral Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, announced that the number of people receiving ARV treatment in developing countries had increased by 75 per cent during 2004 to over 700,000 — including an estimated 325,000 in sub-Saharan Africa. In the view of many public health experts, the rapid increase vindicates what some critics derided as WHO's "irresponsible" and unrealistic 3x5 pledge.

The results also seem to belie predictions that the mix of multilateral and bilateral funding and treatment programmes would prove impossible to coordinate and only further burden overstretched health systems in the worst-affected countries. South Africa, Nigeria and India account for over 40 per cent of the total number of people still in need of ARV treatment, and experts say that a focus in those three countries could produce major gains for treatment access in a short time.

Speaking at a press conference at the World Economic Forum in Davos on 26 January, WHO Director-General Dr. Lee Jong-wook singled out developing countries for much of the credit. "We salute the countries that have now shown us that treatment is possible and can be scaled up even in the poorest settings," he said. "AIDS treatment access is expanding every day thanks to the dedicated work of doctors, nurses, health workers and people living with HIV and AIDS, who are often working under difficult circumstances to turn the dream of universal treatment into a reality." WHO officials assert that at current rates the world is on track to reach the 3x5 goal.

This upbeat assessment is tempered, however, by an estimated $2 bn shortfall to reach the 3 million mark by the end of this year. That amount is part of the $6 bn in additional resources UNAIDS says is needed in 2005 for the full range of HIV/AIDS programmes in developing regions. The treatment drive in many countries is hampered by severe shortages of trained medical personnel and facilities and by continuing controversies over drug prices and patents. "Unless these and other pressing issues are addressed urgently," declared the non-governmental organization Médecins sans Frontières (MSF), "many of those living with HIV/AIDS in developing countries will never get access to life-saving treatment or may not be able to survive once on treatment over the long term."

MSF and other advocacy groups point out that the 700,000 people in ARV treatment represent only about 12 per cent of the nearly 6 million people in developing countries who need it. With the disease taking 8,000 lives daily, and new infections topping 5 million last year alone, MSF declared that "the global picture is bleak.... WHO ... and other institutions should be sounding the alarm."

'A tremendous determination'

Whether one views the pill bottle as half empty or half full, the increased availability of anti-AIDS medicines in Africa is very good news. Although the percentage of Africans currently receiving the life-prolonging drugs remains a low 8 per cent of those requiring it — ARVs are prescribed only for those in the final stages of the disease — the continental average masks significant advances in some countries.

In Botswana, the country with the second-highest HIV-infection rate in the world, an estimated 50 per cent of those in need currently receive ARV drugs. This is due in large part to the government's pioneering decision in 2002 to provide the medications free of charge through the public health system.

Uganda, whose AIDS prevention campaign is already considered a model for effective programmes, now provides ARV treatment to 40 per cent of the 114,000 people who require it. In Cameroon, reports WHO, strong political leadership combined with increased funding assistance and a sharp drop in drug prices has allowed some 12,000 people to begin ARV therapy. Cameroonian authorities say they will triple that number by the end of 2005.

Overall, notes WHO in its December 2004 *3x5 Campaign Report*, anti-retroviral medications are now available at more than 700 sites across the region. The study also found that African ARV patients are equally or more likely than patients in developed countries to maintain the drugs' strict daily treatment schedule. This finding has confounded critics who argued that poor adherence rates would accelerate the emergence of drug-resistant strains of the virus.

WHO also reported that men and women have roughly equal access to ARVs in Africa under the new treatment programmes. This means that women, who make up 57 per cent of Africans living with the virus, are underrepresented in some countries; but the numbers have allayed, at least for now, fears that women would be excluded from national treatment strategies.

In Botswana, the country with the second-highest HIV-infection rate in the world, an estimated 50 per cent of those in need currently receive ARV drugs.

The early success of the treatment drive, says UN Special Envoy for HIV/AIDS in Africa Stephen Lewis, reflects the coming together of new resources from the Global Fund and the US government, the technical support and momentum of WHO's 3x5 campaign and a new sense of urgency among African governments and civil society. Mr. Lewis, a former Canadian diplomat known for his criticism of responses to the pandemic by both donors and African governments, told *Africa Renewal* that in recent months "there has been a huge change for the better" among African political leaders and health officials. "It's like night and day. There is tremendous determination to meet those 3x5 targets."

The reason for the sudden change, he notes, is that in the hardest-hit countries, HIV/AIDS can no longer be ignored. For some leaders "it was the fear that the country was falling apart, the sense that every indicator was being turned back, from life expectancy to levels of poverty to infant and maternal mortality. It made the political leadership say, 'Oh my God, we've got to turn this around.'" In the worst affected regions, "the pervasiveness of death is almost unbelievable. They're in a life-and-death battle, and now everybody sees it that way."

Building capacity

Despite the progress, obstacles to treatment access remain stubbornly in place. Chief among them is the absence of the public health capacity — hospitals and clinics, diagnostic and laboratory facilities, trained medical personnel — to maintain millions of people on the powerful anti-retroviral medications. Although Mr. Lewis estimates that Africa already has the capacity to maintain double the current number of people now on treatment, "the need to increase capacity is huge, and there's a kind of grim, gritted-teeth determination to get it built."

Part of the problem, notes a recent study by WHO and other international health organizations, is the "fatal flow" of African health professionals to better-paying jobs overseas. The study notes that there are more Malawian doctors practicing in the UK city of Manchester than in Malawi itself, while Zambia, with one of the highest HIV-infection rates in the world, has lost to foreign employers 550 of the 600 doctors it has trained since independence.

Malawi and its development partners have responded to the desperate staffing shortage with a programme to improve salaries and working conditions for health professionals and to train a new cadre of health workers able to dispense ARVs and provide basic medical services.

ARV treatment access in countries most affected

Country	Adults with HIV[1]	Adult infection rate	Number needing treatment[2]	Number getting treatment[3]	% under treatment
Swaziland	190,000	38.8	36,500	5,750	16
Botswana	330,000	37.3	75,000	37,500	50
Lesotho	300,000	28.9	56,000	2,750	5
Zimbabwe	1,600,000	24.6	295,000	8,250	3
South Africa	5,100,000	21.5	837,000	55,000	7
Namibia	200,000	21.3	32,000	9250	28

[1] End 2003. [2] End 2004. [3] End 2004, median between low and high estimates.

Source: UN Africa Renewal from UNAIDS, WHO data.

Rebuilding Africa's threadbare public health systems will take time, however, and for millions of people in the last stages of AIDS, time is running out. "Almost everyone would agree that the largest challenge resides around capacity," says Dr. Mark Dybul, the assistant US global AIDS coordinator and chief medical officer for the PEPFAR programme. The US, the Global Fund and WHO programmes therefore focus on "supporting new people on therapy, but simultaneously building new capacity. I don't think it's correct to say that all [the recent increases] have been done using existing capacity."

One small PEPFAR-supported clinic in Namibia, he notes, had the resources to treat several hundred people. "Now they have the capacity to treat a couple of thousand people. They're taking people off the waiting list and putting them on the rolls, because they built new capacity at the same time they began treatment."

Funding support, technical assistance and drugs and equipment could come from outside, Dr. Dybul told *Africa Renewal*. But for the programme to expand, there also needs to be capacity within the country. "And that's got to begin with the national strategy commitment" of the governments and civil societies of affected countries. "What we do is support them.... We [all] need to do more, and we're not there yet... but capacity has been expanded over the past year with tremendous success."

The US programme alone added 155,000 people to the treatment rolls in just eight months in its 15 target countries: Botswana, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Haiti, Guyana and Vietnam. Dr. Dybul says it is on track to reach the 500,000 mark by June 2006.

"I think there are a lot of misconceptions about [ARV] drugs," Dr. Dybul adds. "The cost of anti-retroviral therapy is not drugs.... The major costs are supporting and training personnel, laboratory capacity and supporting those laboratories."

Dr. Dybul puts the annual cost of ARV treatment in Africa at $1,500–$2,500 per person, with drugs accounting for just $300–$600 of the total. "Arguments about the cost of the drugs are for us a red herring," he explains. "That's not the problem right now."

Patent, pricing controversies

But controversies over the safety, supply and cost of anti-AIDS drugs have continued. In contrast to Dr. Dybul's assessment, WHO reported last December that "the high cost of ARV drugs remains a barrier to scaling up HIV treatment and care." Prices for the next generation of anti-AIDS drugs, which will be needed as the virus develops resistance to current medications, "remain prohibitively expensive throughout much of the world," the organization noted. It warned that action is needed now to control future costs.

For more than a decade after the development of the first anti-retrovirals in the late 1980s, their high cost and the complexity of using them kept the life-prolonging medications out of the hands of all but a few very wealthy or very fortunate people in poor countries. At $10,000–$15,000 per year, ARV treatment was simply unaffordable. Efforts by UNAIDS to negotiate discounted prices for developing countries enjoyed only limited success, and the major Northern pharmaceutical companies generally resisted calls to licence inexpensive generic versions of their patented products.

In 2001, however, an Indian pharmaceutical firm, Cipla, introduced an innovative generic medication that combined three of the most effective anti-retroviral drugs into a single pill, known as the triple fixed dose combination tablet (FDC). Not only was the drug easier to administer than its patented competitors — two pills a day compared with six or more of some of the patented formulations — it was available initially for the unheard-of price of $350 per year. After a two-year investigation by WHO's drug prequalification programme, the triple FDC was certified safe and medically equivalent to the patented originals, and went into wide use. With prices now as low as $140 a year, the triple FDC has emerged as the pharmaceutical backbone of the 3x5 campaign and is credited with making it possible to expand ARV treatment.

But PEPFAR requires its grantees to use only drugs certified by the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA), a policy that, in practice, has meant the programme buys only patented products, mainly from US suppliers. PEPFAR officials say the policy is necessary to ensure the safety and quality of drugs and note that a number of generic ARVs have been removed from the WHO pre-approval list after problems were discovered in the certification documents. They also note that foreign generics producers are welcome to submit

AP Photo / Themba Hadebe

Growing public demands for access to AIDS treatment has helped speed up anti-retroviral therapy programmes.

AP Photo / John McConnico

Making generic anti-AIDS medicines in South Africa. Will trade rules hamper generic producers?

their products for FDA approval under a special "fast track" procedure.

To date, however, none of the triple FDC drugs favoured in international treatment programmes has secured FDA approval. The result, reported the US government General Accounting Office, is that PEPFAR currently pays about twice as much for anti-retroviral medications as treatment schemes using generics. The agency estimates that the costs could potentially run into hundreds of millions of dollars over the five-year span of the PEPFAR initiative, reducing the number of people who can be treated for the same money.

In late January, the FDA approved its first generic ARV product, a two-pill package taken twice daily, and applications for other generic products, including triple FDCs, are under review. Treatment advocates welcome the development but charge that the failure of the US to adopt the preferred triple FDC tablet is forcing participating countries to manage different supply chains and treatment regimes — complicating the drive to expand treatment.

Trade rules threaten affordability

The extension of 20-year patent protections to all but the least developed countries on 1 January 2005, under the World Trade Organization's agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), has also set off alarm bells among advocates and health officials. The agreement makes it more difficult for India and other major exporters of generic drugs to continue to supply developing countries with low-cost ARVs and other vital medicines.

The current generation of frontline anti-AIDS drugs are exempt from the new patent rules, says Mr. Brook Baker, a professor at Northeastern University in the US and a member of the treatment advocacy group Health Gap. "The problem will be with the next generation of ARVs in the pipeline. TRIPS will prevent the kind of generic competition that has driven prices down in the past."

In August 2003, the WTO's TRIPS Council, under pressure particularly from African countries to create a public-health exemption to the new rules, reached an agreement to permit the export of generic drugs for public health emergencies. But the exemption is limited and procedurally complex. To date, no country has attempted to use it.

Mr. Baker also notes that US negotiators are seeking patent protections in excess of WTO requirements in regional and bilateral trade talks. These so-called "TRIPS plus" agreements, Global AIDS Fund head Richard Feacham said last year, have the effect of "either pushing [drug] prices up or preventing their fall," further limiting the availability of affordable medications.

Canada recently amended its patent laws to permit the pharmaceutical industry to use the WTO exemption, but according to Mr. Richard Elliot, the director of legal research and policy at the Canadian HIV/AIDS Legal Network and a member of the government's Ministerial Council on AIDS, its provisions too are complex and restrictive. So far, he told *Africa Renewal*, no Canadian company has sought an export license under the new law.

Short on resources, long on needs

The rapid expansion of AIDS treatment programmes has brought with it equally dramatic demands for new resources. And while the 3x5 campaign and the US programme have short-term targets, they are creating long-term obligations to the millions of people entering treatment, since ARV therapy must continue for life. When UNAIDS was launched in 1996, the organization noted recently, global spending on the full range of HIV/AIDS initiatives in low- and moderate-income countries was $300 mn. Last year, reports the Washington-based Kaiser Family Foundation, spending topped $6 bn.

But even that impressive figure, notes the UN's Mr. Lewis, is just half the $12 bn UNAIDS estimates is needed this year to continue expanding treatment programmes and meet education, prevention, counselling and research needs. The Global Fund needs $1 bn this year to cover its commitments, he says. "WHO is short $60 mn for the final vital push on 3x5 and they still don't have it. I don't understand this grudging incrementalism by Western countries. We're losing incredible numbers of lives every day."

UNAIDS estimates that by 2007 $20 bn will be needed for the fight against AIDS, and Mr. Lewis calls on wealthy governments to make major new commitments at the upcoming meeting of the Group of Eight industrialized countries. "We have more money now, but in a few years we'll be fighting desperately for dollars again. Prices for the next generation of drugs are very, very high. They will have to be negotiated down and ways found to make generics."

"Everywhere we turn we have impediments," he acknowledges. "But we also have a momentum that is unstoppable. I see the focus everywhere in Africa. Now the commitment is tremendous." ■

Getting to the heart of the matter

An interview with Nobel Peace Laureate Wangari Maathai

On 10 December 2004, the noted environmentalist, women's rights activist and pro-democracy campaigner Ms. Wangari Maathai became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize. She gained international recognition in 1977, when she founded the Green Belt Movement to combat deforestation and soil erosion in her native Kenya. During an exclusive interview with Africa Renewal in New York on 19 December, the 64-year-old biologist spoke about her long struggle for environmental and social justice. The full interview can be found under "New Releases" on the Africa Renewal website: <www.un.org/AR>.

UN Photo/Evan Schneider

Wangari Maathai speaking at the UN in December 2004

AR: Could you please talk about the connection between human rights and environmental issues, and how you came to it?

Maathai: In the beginning, 30 years ago, I was responding to the needs of rural populations, especially women, who were looking for firewood. They were looking for food. They were looking for building materials, for fodder for the animals. They were trying to meet the basic needs in their communities. I immediately connected what they were asking for with the land. I suggested that what we needed was to plant trees.

It was then that I confronted the problem of democratic governance. I noticed that we really did not have a democratic system, because immediately we started organizing, the government did not want us to organize. The government said you cannot meet. If you're in a system which does not allow its citizens to participate in decision-making, or demand certain decisions from their government, it is impossible to protect the environment. Therefore for me, the connection between protecting the environment, managing resources responsibly and allowing for equitable distribution of these resources to avoid conflict required democratic space.

AR: Most economists define development in a traditional way — producing cash crops, industrial development, emphasizing trade. But you don't define it that way.

Maathai: No. Development to me is a quality of life. It's not necessarily acquisition of a lot of things. I have been using the example of an African stool. An African stool has three legs. On those legs balance a basin. One of those three legs is peace. Another is good governance. And the other is good management of our resources. Now this good management of our resources, as I've said, includes equitable distribution — allowing as many people as possible to share in the natural resources. This allows as many people as possible to experience respect, dignity [and] respect of their rights — and therefore avoids conflict.

AR: In 1995 you gave a speech at the Beijing women's conference that included criticism of the world economic system and globalization. What are your views today?

Maathai: It has only gotten worse. Africa has not been given the opportunity to do trade fairly. The trade balance, the trade tariffs, the rules and regulations which are required for Africa, are still very harsh, very unequal.

The debt has continued to eat into the capital of Africa so strongly that many governments are still not able to service their people as long as they are servicing the debt. We raised all the issues why it should be cancelled, but the industrialized countries did not do very much.

Unfortunately, our own governments have not done their part either. I remember the industrialized countries and even the World Bank saying, "If we cancelled this debt, it is not the poor who will benefit. It is the leaders — who are corrupt, who are mismanaging the economies of your countries, who are undemocratic, who are engaging in wars and making it impossible for people to do even the little that they could — who will benefit. Therefore it

"We see more governments which have been brought into place by the ballot rather than the bullet."

UN Photo/Milton Grant

doesn't make any sense to cancel."

That's where the challenge is today — for African governments to decide whether they want to continue doing business as usual or whether they want to appreciate this challenge that has been brought to us. If our friends want to assist, we need to create an enabling environment in Africa.

AR: Are African governments becoming more accountable to their citizens?

Maathai: Yes, I believe that African governments at this time are actually much more responsive to the issue of governance than they have been in the past. We see more governments which have been brought into place by the ballot rather than the bullet. We have seen a lot of long-standing conflicts eventually come to an end. We have seen within the African Union a desire to provide checks and balances for good governance. They have come up with this formula of peer review. These are all good signs that Africans are willing to judge themselves, to urge each other to practice good governance and give the region peace.

We cannot afford to have a region where a few people are filthy rich and a huge number of people are in dehumanizing poverty. Definitely we cannot use our resources to fight each other and kill each other, to the extent that we are now engaging our children to go to the forefront. By doing that we don't have a future! To me, that is the message this [Nobel] prize brings to Africa.

AR: Should human rights and democracy be the price of admission to the world market or is it just another conditionality that burdens Africa, as some argue?

Maathai: Quite often, people think that democracy, perhaps because it's a Western concept, a Greek word, is something that is being imposed on Africans. But I know that even within our own traditional governance systems, this concept of equity was very strong — even stronger than it is in many Western democracies. So I believe very strongly that it is not a new concept. It is not a Western concept. It is not a conditionality that is coming from outside

When we got independence, for some reason people who became leaders at that time failed to see that the kind of lifestyle the colonial administrators were living was exploitative, undemocratic and brought conflicts. We changed guards and continued with the lifestyle. It is only the African leaders who can change that.

Ms. Maathai challenging government security guards during tree-planting drive in 1999

AR: Many African leaders would say that with the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) they are changing. What is your assessment?

Maathai: All of these initiatives are very good on paper. There is even a new initiative by the prime minister of Britain, the Commission for Africa. In East Africa we have IGAD [Inter-Governmental Authority on Development], we have several economic blocs. All these initiatives mean well. The NEPAD document itself, when you read it, looks very good.

But the test of these initiatives is delivery. The challenge is in the leadership. Are they going to engage in a series of talk shops or are they going to be seriously interested in bringing about change? We have to see. The taste is in the pudding.

AR:. What would you like to see wealthy countries do in response?

Maathai: The developed countries know very well what Africa needs. There has been so much debate about it. We all know that their excuses have been corruption, misgovernance and money being used for weapons. They are excuses, but to a certain extent legitimate. What would be the excuse if we really created the enabling environment? It would be interesting! We would be talking about a different era altogether. We would be saying, "There is no corruption any more. There is no misgovernance any more. There is commitment by the government." Then the developed countries would be challenged to meet their commitments.

AR: Is there a sense that the former colonial powers must still make restitution to Africa? It is sometimes argued today that Western liability for Africa has ended.

Maathai: We are dealing with the almost inevitable consequences of a transference of power without the mental shift and governance shift that the people of Africa expected. The citizens of Africa wanted freedom. They wanted development. They wanted to move away from colonialism to development.

It is their leaders who did not take them towards that path! And for many years, the citizens believed in their leaders. That's almost the tragedy of the African people — they have been so trusting of their leaders. So many of the leaders are like me. They have come to the West. They have studied in the West. We gained skills and knowledge and we were expected to go back and help our people. But many of us went back and took advantage of their confidence in us — believing that we knew better than them.

We were coming to deliver them. Well, we didn't. We took advantage of them and we used them. We now need to tell them we are sorry we betrayed them. Now we have to do it right. ■

Peace pact raises hope in Senegal

After 22 years, Casamance war is winding down

By **Ernest Harsch**

As government and rebel leaders were gathering to sign a peace accord in Ziguinchor to end one of Africa's longest civil conflicts, people in other parts of Casamance, Senegal's southernmost region, were already experiencing the fruits of peace. With financing from the government, World Bank and other donors, some 35 kilometres of rural roads had been built over the past two years to 10 remote communities. Among a score of completed school projects, a new teachers' college opened in Nyassa in September, along with a health clinic and a textiles and clothing manufacturing centre. In nearby Youtou, work has begun on a community cultural centre. In the village of Mpack — once on the front lines of the war — a new marketplace has been built.

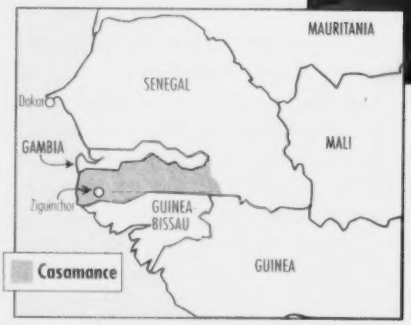
In light of such tangible progress, Mr. Mamadou Mbodji, a representative of the non-governmental Forum Civil, saw the 30 December 2004 agreement as more of a shift than a new beginning. "At the economic level — and the social level as well — peace has come to Casamance. Even in the military sphere, there has been a halt to the fighting. The agreement today will formalize this situation."

The accord reflects high-level political commitment from both sides. President Abdoulaye Wade attended the ceremony, and the accord was signed by his interior minister and by Father Augustin Diamacoune Senghor, general secretary of the insurgent Mouvement des Forces Démocratiques de la Casamance (MFDC).

To a cheering crowd of thousands, President Wade pledged that his government would negotiate the details of a definitive settlement. He promised CFA80 bn (nearly US$160 mn) from the government and donor agencies to continue reconstruction and development programmes in Casamance, as well as to reintegrate the MFDC's ex-combatants.

Father Diamacoune called on all MFDC members and supporters to abide by the accord, which explicitly renounces armed violence and commits the movement to pursuing its aims by political means. That point was symbolized by the presence of a detachment of 99 members of Atika, the MFDC's military wing, wearing T-shirts proclaiming "peace."

"Peace will change many things in the region, especially for the economy," commented Mr. Samba Sylla, a Ziguinchor businessman. "Now the region is economically asphyxiated because of its isolation. But once peace returns, we can hope for new opportunities."



AFP / Getty Images / Seyllou Diallo

President Abdoulaye Wade (left) with Father Augustin Diamacoune Senghor, political leader of the Casamance rebels.

West Africa's longest war

The war in Casamance was West Africa's oldest and most persistent. Although it never approached the scale of many other conflicts in the region, it still caused significant suffering among the people of Casamance, and just across Senegal's borders. Humanitarian groups estimate that up to 5,000 people were killed during two decades of fighting, that more than 60,000 have been internally displaced and that tens of thousands more have sought refuge in neighbouring Guinea-Bissau and the Gambia.

A definitive resolution of the Casamance war would further reduce tensions in the region. Peace has recently been restored in Sierra Leone and more tentatively in Liberia, but Côte d'Ivoire is divided by rival armed forces and neighbouring Guinea-Bissau remains politically unsettled.

One major factor in the Casamance conflict has been the region's relative isolation from the rest of the country. It is physically separated from most of northern Senegal by the Gambia (see map). Besides this geographical divide, Casamance is socially and ethnically distinct. Nearly two-thirds of its people are Diola, while Wolof, who are the largest group nationally, constitute just 5 per cent of Casamance's population.

Regionalist sentiment existed even before independence in 1960. But President Léopold Sédar Senghor managed to accommodate local aspirations to some extent by bringing prominent Casamançais into the government. Then economic austerity in the 1970s made it harder to create public jobs, while severe drought led more and more Wolof and other northerners to migrate to Ziguinchor and Casamance's fertile countryside. This demographic pressure — combined with an agrarian reform law that undermined traditional land rights — heightened local resentments.

Repression provokes insurgency

In December 1982, hundreds of Casamançais, including many women, demonstrated in Ziguinchor. The authorities responded with widespread arrests. President Wade has acknowledged that the government's crackdown on the peaceful women's protest was a "mistake" that set the stage for the subsequent insurgency.

A year later, another large demonstration was held in Ziguinchor, with protesters and the newly created MFDC openly calling for Casamance's independence. The army moved in with gunfire, killing two dozen civilians, according to the official toll, and possibly several times that number, according to other sources. Hundreds were arrested.

With the channels for peaceful protest closed off, a number of MFDC leaders who had escaped detention went into the forests and into exile to begin organizing an armed wing of the movement, Atika ("warrior" in the Diola language). They spent most of that decade recruiting, training and acquiring weapons, including from arms caches left behind by Guinea-Bissau's former liberation movement and from purchases on the regional arms market.

In 1990, Atika began to attack Senegalese army camps and patrols systematically. The armed forces responded with large-scale deployments and sweeps. A 1991 cease-fire agreement with the MFDC's Northern Front brought relative calm to the area along the border with the Gambia. But fighting raged sporadically elsewhere for the rest of the decade.

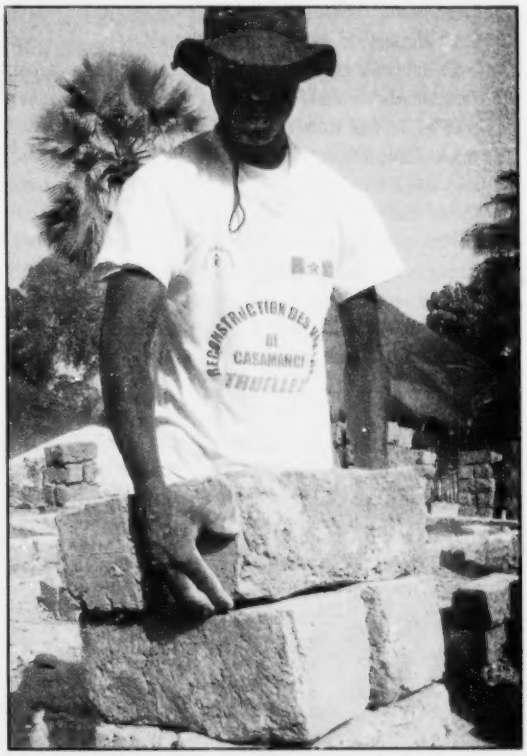
The army was accused by Amnesty International and local human rights groups of torture and summary executions of suspected MFDC supporters. The rebels were blamed for attacking civilians and for laying landmines that caused hundreds of serious injuries and deaths. Because of the general insecurity, about 230 Casamançais villages were abandoned, while the area's agricultural production and tourism were severely hurt.

Guinea-Bissau connection

One early advantage held by the MFDC was its ability to operate from rear bases across the heavily forested border with neighbouring Guinea-Bissau. The presence of large numbers of Casamançais refugees, as well as ethnic and family ties with local communities, facilitated the MFDC's movement through that country.

In time, the MFDC's presence became a destabilizing factor within Guinea-Bissau. A government attempt to dismiss an army commander accused of selling arms to the MFDC precipitated a brief but intense civil war in 1998–99. While fighters from the MFDC's hardline Southern Front joined the opposition forces, Senegal dispatched 2,500 troops to support the government.

Thanks to regional peacekeeping efforts, a semblance of peace was restored in Guinea-Bissau, although the political situation there remains uncertain. The end to the civil war led to a shift in Casamance's own conflict, since it brought the expulsion of most MFDC forces from Guinea-Bissau in 2000–01. That military setback — combined with an erosion of the MFDC's public support in Casamance itself — eventually spurred most segments of the group to move away from armed struggle.



AFP/ Getty Images/ Seyllou Diallo

A young volunteer helping rebuild a Casamance village destroyed in the war.

Meanwhile, the Senegalese presidential election in 2000 brought the national political opposition, led by Mr. Wade, to power. In one of his very first speeches, President Wade proclaimed that ending the conflict in Casamance would be his government's "priority of priorities."

Some of the government's initial attempts to negotiate with the MFDC bogged down, in part because of splits within the movement's political and military wings. But gradually, other segments of Casamançais society — women, youth associations, artists and musicians, civil servants and traditional leaders — started holding meetings, street marches and other actions to demand that both sides sit down at the peace table. This put further pressure on various MFDC leaders to renounce armed struggle, and paved the way for the 30 December accord.

Because of such internal political dynamics, the peace process in Senegal has been primarily homegrown, in contrast with most other recent agreements in Africa. Although the neighbouring countries of Guinea-Bissau and the Gambia contributed to improving conditions for peace, no outside mediators were involved in the actual talks. "There is no foreign government or organization acting as a guarantor," commented Mr. Pape Samba Kâne, editor of the independent newspaper *Taxi*.

Development high on agenda

Although the MFDC originally proclaimed independence as its goal, Mr. Robert Sagna, the mayor of Ziguinchor, noted that in his discussions with the rebels they most often complained about being excluded from the region's economic and political development and wanted to be "recognized as full Senegalese."

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Tough UN line on peacekeeper abuses

Action initiated to end sexual misdeeds in peacekeeping missions

By **Michael Fleshman**

The devotion to duty of nine UN peacekeepers who died in a hail of rebel bullets in the lawless eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo on 25 February is a grim reminder of how high the price of peace can be. Their sacrifice stands in stark contrast to the behaviour of a small minority of "blue helmets" responsible for acts of sexual exploitation and abuse that have damaged the credibility of the UN mission in the Congo. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has denounced the abuses as "an ugly stain" on the world body. He has put in place tough new measures to end them, including a dusk-to-dawn curfew for military personnel and an outright ban on unauthorized contact with local residents.

AP Photo / Sayyid Azim

MONUC peacekeepers in Bunia, eastern Congo: Their duty is to protect civilians.

Investigators have been sent to the country to examine allegations of sexual abuse by UN personnel, and this has resulted in dozens of expulsions and some criminal prosecutions by the offenders' home governments. Deputy Secretary-General Louise Fréchette visited UN peace missions in West Africa to emphasize the organization's "zero tolerance" for sexual assault, child abuse and prostitution.

Despite these actions, press reports indicate that sexual misconduct in peacekeeping missions is continuing. This underscores the difficulty of maintaining discipline among some 80,000 military and civil personnel currently scattered over 16 countries around the world, not counting a new mission slated for Sudan. The problem is compounded by the little-recognized fact that responsibility for training, command and discipline of peacekeeping troops is almost entirely in the hands of the member states that contribute the troops. This limits the UN's ability to enforce standards of behaviour in its missions and can fuel perceptions that the organization condones or ignores sexual abuse.

As investigators examine reports of misconduct in several peacekeeping missions and evidence emerges that abuses have been committed by UN personnel in Haiti, Burundi and Liberia, Mr. Annan warned the Security Council in February that success in rooting out abusers "will be measured not by a decrease in allegations but, on the contrary, a likely increase" as more misconduct is uncovered. "We must leave no stone unturned."

When accounts began to surface early last year of sexual misconduct by UN personnel in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) the peacekeeping department requested an investigation by the UN's Office for Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). The abuses OIOS uncovered were appalling. One former civilian member of the mission was expelled after Congolese police found videos and photographs of the perpetrator with Congolese children and young women. He is now in prison in France awaiting trial. Other allegations centred on uniformed members of the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUC) stationed in the eastern town of Bunia, who have been accused of soliciting prostitution and exchanging money and food for sex with refugees — some as young as 12.

As of early March, OIOS investigators had recommended disciplinary action against nine civilian MONUC members and 65 soldiers, 63 of whom have been expelled from the mission and repatriated. But they noted that other cases had been dropped because the victims were unable or unwilling to identify their assailants.

"Equally disturbing," the OIOS investigators charged, was the lack of a programme to enforce the UN's long-standing "zero tolerance" policy. That policy, strengthened in recent years in response to past problems and incorporated into ongoing efforts to improve gender balance and sensitivity in UN peace operations. It prohibits sexual activities with persons under 18, the exchange of money, goods or services for sexual favours, visits to brothels or other areas declared "off-limits" and any conduct deemed sexually abusive, exploitive or degrading. The OIOS reported, however, that MONUC had failed to put enforcement mechanisms in place — producing a situation the investigating body described as "zero compliance with zero tolerance."

Crackdown launched

"We have a real substantive problem, not just a public relations issue that needs to be 'spun,'" the head of the peacekeeping department, Under-Secretary-General

Jean-Marie Guéhenno, said after the report's release on 8 January. "We have to deal with it collectively, aggressively and quickly. And we must prevent it from happening again in the future."

To that end, Mr. Annan and other senior UN leaders have imposed a range of new restrictions on MONUC and other peacekeeping staff, expanded monitoring and enforcement operations and pursued changes in training, command and disciplinary methods with troop contributing countries. The new policies have not yet succeeded in eliminating sexual misconduct, however, leading some critics, including conservative members of the US Congress, to demand that the UN impose far harsher punishments on individual peacekeepers and on governments that fail to discipline offenders.

Yet the US and other powerful UN member states have never given the UN Secretariat such authority over peacekeeping troops. Although UN personnel rules and peacekeeping codes have been steadily strengthened in recent years, enforcement of such rules for peacekeeping troops, including punishment for violations, is the responsibility of individual contributing countries. Under agreements regulating the relationship between the UN and troop contributors, peacekeepers are deployed as national contingents, each with its own commanders. The UN can ask for repatriation of individuals suspected of misconduct, request that the contributing country take appropriate disciplinary action and bar the suspects from future missions. But the UN does not have the authority to bring criminal charges or to convict and punish blue helmets for misconduct. It is the responsibility of each government to decide whether or how to punish its nationals for misconduct on UN missions.

With those constraints in mind, Ms. Jane Holl Lute, the UN's assistant secretary-general for peacekeeping, outlined the range of actions already initiated by the UN Secretariat at a briefing to members of the US Congress in March. "Individually these actions may seem unsatisfying," Ms. Lute conceded. "But when you combine them together they represent a comprehensive program and mark our determination."

The UN actions relating to MONUC include:

- a ban on all unofficial contact and fraternization by mission personnel with local communities
- a dusk-to-dawn curfew on military personnel, so that they do not leave their base during night time off-hours
- the prohibition of civilian dress for uniformed contingents, to ease monitoring and identification of UN personnel
- increased cooperation with Congolese police to reduce informal contact between UN personnel and local women
- expanded training in UN codes of conduct and personnel rules regarding sexual abuse and exploitation
- the designation of some local business establishments, including brothels and some bars, as "off-limits to UN personnel"
- improved amenities and recreational facilities on base
- improved communications with local communities and civil authorities, including the creation of a confidential "hotline" to report abuses
- the establishment of a new office within MONUC to investigate any new allegations.

The Secretary-General has requested an additional 100 military police to help enforce the new restrictions on MONUC, which currently maintains about 18,000 soldiers and civilians, including 175 civilian police, in scattered outposts in a country the size of Western Europe.

Mr. Annan has also promised to hold to account anyone in the chain of command found complicit with the abuses. Six Moroccan field officers have been relieved of duty and changes in the leadership of the troubled mission are also underway. A team of experts headed by Assistant Secretary-General Angela Kane travelled to the DRC for seven weeks at the beginning of the year to investigate all outstanding accusations of misconduct and examine MONUC disciplinary and command procedures.

"The blue helmet has become black and blue through self-inflicted wounds. We will not sit still until the lustre of that blue helmet is restored."

— Ms. Jane Holl Lute, assistant secretary-general for peacekeeping

Reforms are also underway at UN headquarters in New York. A permanent unit on sexual abuse and exploitation has been established in Mr. Guéhenno's office, while an interagency task force on sexual abuse, headed by Assistant Secretary-General Lute, coordinates the overall effort and develops recommendations for further action. Officers charged with monitoring and enforcing UN rules against sexual misconduct have been dispatched to every peacekeeping mission, and training for existing human rights and gender advisers is being strengthened.

Dialogue with contributing countries

Mr. Annan has opened a dialogue with troop contributing countries as well, appointing Jordanian Ambassador to the UN Prince Zeid Ra'ad Zeid al-Hussein to develop proposals for comprehensive reform of disciplinary and training procedures. In a detailed report released on 24 March, Prince Zeid recommended, among other things, that the General Assembly require troop contributing countries to investigate charges of sexual misconduct brought by UN investigators and report on the outcome of each case. Disciplinary proceedings should be conducted in the host country whenever possible, and individual peacekeepers should be held financially accountable for their abuses through payment of compensation, including child support, to the victims.

One difficulty in securing agreement on enforcement of UN personnel rules, Ms. Lute told the US Congress, is that some actions prohibited for peacekeepers, such as soliciting prostitution and having intimate relations with anyone under age 18, are legal in parts of the world. With 103 troop contributing countries, each with widely differing laws and social mores and varying degrees of capacity in national criminal and military justice systems, it is extremely difficult to reach consensus on a one-size-fits-all code of conduct.

Obtaining the hard evidence needed for criminal prosecution is another challenge.

The UN is bound by international legal standards of due process, including the presumption of innocence, and sexual assaults are notoriously difficult to prove even in countries with sophisticated police forces and criminal justice systems. The challenges UN investigators face in building cases in conflict areas, often working with victims and witnesses already traumatized by violence and fearful of retribution for cooperating with interviewers, can be enormous.

Leery of 'naming and shaming'

There are political difficulties as well. OIOS investigators have reported instances of misconduct among troops from many contributing countries. Yet representatives of some of the largest contributors, all of which are developing countries, have expressed concerns about their countries' being singled out and stigmatized for the actions of the abusive few. Those concerns have been fuelled by some critics of the UN's handling of the scandal, who demand that the UN "name and shame" the offenders' countries of origin. Others propose completely barring from participation in any peacekeeping missions those countries that fail to prosecute the accused.

Mr. Annan and other senior officials have indicated that discussions with troop contributors are going well. They point to Morocco's announcement that six of its soldiers who were serving in the DRC have been charged with criminal offences as a sign of the willingness of contributing states to hold abusers to account. France and South Africa have also filed criminal charges against personnel over alleged misconduct in MONUC.

But with nearly 80,000 uniformed and civilian personnel currently in the field and a major new mission authorized in Sudan, the UN is already struggling to find enough troops to go around. Some UN officials fear that adverse publicity, or actions that might appear to infringe on sensitive issues of national sovereignty, could persuade some of the largest contributors to withdraw from or scale back on peacekeeping operations.

With the need for blue helmets at an historic high — and many Northern countries more reluctant than in the past to provide troops — peacekeeping officials are understandably concerned about reducing the number of participating governments. "We could score a quick public relations success by naming countries," Ms. Lute acknowledged. "But we would sacrifice the long-term engagement with the member states to secure their cooperation and commitment" to the reform proposals.

'Boys will be boys'

The UN is also struggling with aspects of military culture that can contribute to sexual misconduct by peacekeepers, including the implicit tolerance of abuses by commanders and civilian administrators in the field. Soldiers are, of necessity, trained to be aggressive, physically dominant and willing to take risks. It has long been recognized that such battlefield virtues can spill over into relations between troops and local civilian populations — particularly when large numbers of young men are removed from the cultural and legal constraints back home. There is also a tendency among many troop commanders to look the other way at some forms of sexual contact between soldiers and civilians, such as prostitution. Such liaisons are often quietly accepted as an inevitable part of military life.

The UN, however, is now confronting these permissive attitudes and seeking to instil a climate of strict discipline in all peacekeeping missions, in part by reinforcing the duty of peacekeepers to protect civilians. "The blue helmet has become black and blue through self-inflicted wounds," says Ms. Lute. "We will not sit still until the lustre of that blue helmet is restored."

Training in military codes of conduct and respect for the rights of civilians in

AFP (Getty Images / David Duncan)

Women who were raped by an insurgent group in the Congo: Assistance for victims is essential.

Aiding the victims

The Democratic Republic of the Congo's minister of women and family affairs, Ms. Fabiola Faida Mwangilwa, says that it is vital to assist the country's tens of thousands of victims of sexual violence, often committed by Congolese warring factions — but also by some UN peacekeepers. "The women of the DRC are demanding reparations," she told *Africa Renewal*. "It is not just about repatriating a soldier, it is about a crime that was committed." In addition to sustaining physical and emotional injuries, many of the girls have been ostracized by their families and communities, she says.

There is also the issue of children born of assaults or exploitative sex. "The UN must take some responsibility for these babies," she continued. "When [assaults] are committed by belligerent armed groups, it is somewhat comprehensible. When the soldiers are there to protect the population, it is very disturbing."

The DRC's government and the UN have established a joint initiative to help victims of sexual exploitation and abuse rebuild their lives. The initiative focuses on:

- medical care
- psychological counselling and treatment
- relocation and reintegration
- child welfare and education.

Belgium has contributed €8.7 mn to the initiative, enabling it to operate in three of the country's 11 provinces. Additional donor support, Ms. Mwangilwa concluded, is urgently needed.

conflict situations is already a feature of military training in virtually every army in the world. In addition, the UN also requires troop contributing countries to provide further training to their peacekeepers in UN rules and policies — including the zero-tolerance policy and their additional responsibilities as representatives of the international community. UN training programmes on the rights and vulnerabilities of women and girls in conflicts have been strengthened in recent years in response to past abuses, as part of an effort within the UN to promote greater gender balance and awareness throughout peace operations.

The recent revelations demonstrate, however, that training programmes and codes of conduct have only limited impact in the absence of rigorous enforcement by military and civilian leaders. As recently as 2002 allegations surfaced that UN personnel and humanitarian workers at UN-administered camps in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea were forcing refugee women and young children to provide sexual favours in exchange for desperately needed food, medicines and other relief supplies. The charges — strikingly similar to those made in the DRC — were also investigated by OIOS, but dropped for lack of evidence. The investigation was criticized by some human rights and aid agencies as an effort by the UN to downplay the incidents.

Allegations of sexual misconduct by UN peacekeeping personnel go back at least as far as the 1992–93 deployment in Cambodia. Those allegations, largely concerning solicitation of prostitution, were dismissed at the time by the mission head with the often-cited observation that "boys will be boys." The UN mission in the former Yugoslavia also became embroiled in allegations that some of its military and civil police personnel were involved in human trafficking and prostitution rings fuelled by the presence of large numbers of UN and NATO peacekeepers in the region. Although a number of people were dismissed, a formal investigation again found insufficient evidence of widespread wrongdoing.

Although UN personnel rules and peacekeeping codes have been steadily strengthened in recent years, enforcement of such rules for peacekeeping troops, including punishment for violations, is the responsibility of individual contributing countries.

Unlike in the past, the UN has moved aggressively and publicly to confront the current scandal and prevent recurrences. But even those steps, the DRC's UN representative to the UN asserted, have come very late. Speaking to UN Radio in late January, Ambassador Atoki Ileka said that the government first raised concerns about misconduct by UN personnel in 2000, but "nothing had been done. Now it's come to the stage where it has become a scandal. Because it has become a scandal that is known worldwide . . . the UN is taking steps to solve it."

Yet the ambassador also praised MONUC for its role in the DRC peace process, noting that the blue helmets helped end a war in which tens of thousands of Congolese women and girls were brutally raped, assaulted and enslaved by various Congolese military forces. Part of the tragedy, he continued, is that "for many of the Congolese, they have no more confidence in the UN. That confidence we have to restore. . . . The UN has a crucial role to play in the DRC and it's important that we tackle the issue and solve it as soon as possible." ■

Peace pact raises hope in Senegal

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As cease-fire agreements took hold, the government and various donor agencies began addressing the region's relative marginalization. The entire cabinet convened in Ziguinchor in July 2003 — the first time it had ever met outside Dakar, the national capital — to discuss how to allocate some CFA67 bn that had been pledged by donor agencies for Casamance's reconstruction and development. Plans included construction of a regional university and a second high school in Ziguinchor, restoration of ferry service between Casamance and Dakar, rehabilitation of the road network, construction of a bridge across the Gambia River and improvement of two local airports, as well as the establishment of special funds to revive Casamance's tourist services and finance women's small-scale business enterprises.

The government also encouraged youths from throughout the country to volunteer for reconstruction activities. Working alongside troops from the regular army, dozens came to Casamance to refurbish damaged infrastructure and to rebuild houses for displaced people returning home.

In such ways, the rebels and the wider population could see the concrete benefits of peace — and the advantages of working with other Senegalese to advance the region's development. Most prominent MFDC leaders have stopped calling for independence and now seem open to a different political status for Casamance.

A month after the signing of the accord, government and MFDC negotiators met again for the first in a series of talks on the details of a comprehensive settlement. The two sides agreed to set up committees consisting of government, military and MFDC figures to oversee the disarmament and demobilization of former insurgents, as well as their reintegration into productive activities or into the regular army and police. Progress has also been made in establishing programmes for demining operations and the return of refugees and displaced people.

"The work of consolidation, through ongoing dialogue, remains," emphasizes Mr. Alioune Tine, head of a national human rights group. "Disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and social reintegration must succeed. We have to reinforce everything that destroys the economy of war, in favour of an economy of peace. We must ensure that the glimmer becomes a flame." ■

African economic forecasts are brighter

But estimates vary and uncertainties abound

By **David Mehdi Hamam**

Africa's economic performance over the last three decades has been mixed, with the 1980s often referred to as a "lost decade," while the mid-1990s brought the beginnings of a recovery. Since then, growth in sub-Saharan Africa has averaged well above 3 per cent a year, compared with just 1 per cent annually during the first half of the 1990s.

In their latest reports, various development agencies and international financial institutions provide scenarios for Africa's economic prospects. While generally upbeat, their forecasts diverge (see table). For example, the World Bank predicts that Africa's gross domestic product (GDP) will grow by 3.6 per cent this year, while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecasts 5.4 per cent growth.

In part, such disparities exist because these institutions employ different assumptions about world economic growth, oil and commodity prices, aid flows and other economic and geopolitical variables. Their data coverage and methods of calculation also vary, contributing to discrepancies in both estimates of past performance and predictions about the future. Countries often send a different data set to each institution, depending on its specific requirements. Moreover, some inconsistencies can result from the use of different base years for estimating GDP at constant prices.

As far as the country projections are concerned, the weight given to certain factors considered to be important for the future can dramatically affect forecasts. For instance, for countries deemed to be better integrated into the world economy, external factors such as world economic growth or exchange rate fluctuations are given more weight. Finally, data from Africa are not always reliable. Most of the time they are estimates, not actual values.

Weather and commodity prices

According to the 2004 World Economic and Social Survey, issued by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA), growth in Africa will continue in 2004 and 2005, reflecting mainly an increase in both agricultural and industrial production in many African countries. A substantial increase in exports of manufactured products to the European Union and the US, as a result of improved market access agreements as well as a boom in non-oil commodity exports, should also improve the near-term economic outlook. The report adds, however, that poor weather could disrupt agricultural output, while further increases in fuel prices would seriously affect oil-importing countries.

Africa: real GDP growth
(annual percentage change)

Institution	2002	2003	2004	2005
DESA	3.4	4.4	4.5	4.7
ECA	3.2	3.8	4.4	...
IMF	3.5	4.3	4.5	5.4
OECD-ADB	2.7	3.6	3.6	4.0
World Bank	3.1	3.0	3.2	3.6

Sources: DESA, ECA, IMF, OECD-ADB and World Bank.

The UN Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), in its *Economic Report on Africa 2004*, forecast average GDP growth in Africa to increase to 4.4 per cent in 2004, up from 3.8 per cent the year before. Like DESA, it sees an increase in agricultural output due to improved weather, combined with a rise in world market prices for African metals and mineral exports, as contributing factors.

Without providing a specific growth figure for 2005, the ECA argues that the continent's short-term development prospects have been strengthened by sound political and economic reforms. In addition, some countries have moved from conflict to peace, placing themselves in a good position to reap the benefits of greater aid and domestic and foreign investment.

According to the IMF's latest *World Economic Outlook*, Africa's improved performance reflects a combination of factors. These include improvements in macroeconomic stability, global economic recovery, higher demand for primary commodities (mainly in 2004), more favourable weather conditions in some countries, the reduction of Africa's external debt burdens and relatively easier access to markets in developed countries.

Persistent 'development gap'

According to Mr. Raghuram Rajan, the IMF's economic counselor and research director, these gains remain fragile. He adds that current growth rates are not enough to halve poverty by 2015, the target set by the Millennium Development Goals. The challenge for Africa, he says, is to achieve sustained strong growth.

The 2004 *African Economic Outlook*, produced jointly by the industrialized countries' Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the African Development Bank (ADB), attributes its forecast of a slight rise in growth in 2005 to three main elements: favourable international commodity prices, higher levels of international aid and improved security in key countries. But it warns that the recovery could be short-lived if sluggish economic growth persists in the euro zone, the destination for about half of Africa's exports.

The World Bank's *2005 Global Economic Prospects and the Developing Countries* also predicts higher growth rates for 2004 and 2005, in part based on assumptions of revived economic activity in Europe. But while oil-producing countries will enjoy increased demand, Africa's oil-importing economies will remain vulnerable. The World Bank's chief economist, Mr. François Bourguignon, points out that despite substantially improved performance, growth in Africa will still lag behind the rest of the world. The result, he says, will be a widening "development gap." ■

David Mehdi Hamam is a senior economic affairs officer in the UN's Office of the Special Adviser on Africa.

AFRICA AGENDA

19–21 April 2005, Midrand (South Africa) — The Power Generation World Africa 2005. This 7th annual conference will discuss strategies for improving power generation, transmission and funding in Africa. Contact Chris Raubenheimer, tel (27 11) 516 4039, e-mail <chris.raubenheimer@terrapinn.co.za>, website <www.powergenerationworld.com/2005/power_za/>.

4–6 May 2005, Pretoria (South Africa) — International Conference on Ethics, Politics and Criminality: Perspectives from Greek Philosophy and Africa. The South African Society for Greek Philosophy and the Humanities conference will address themes such as democracy, social justice and criminality. Contact A. Ladikos, e-mail <ladika@unisa.ac.za>, website <www.up.ac.za/academic/humanities/eng/eng/sasgph/eng/new.htm>.

24–26 May 2005, Moscow (Russia) — 10th Conference of Africanists on the theme "Security for Africa: Internal and External Aspects." Organized by the Academic Council on Problems of African Countries and the Institute for African Studies. Contact Conference Organizing Committee, Institute of African Studies, tel (7-095) 290-2752, 290-6385, fax (7-095) 202-0786, e-mail <inter@inafr.ru> and copy to <vladimir.shubin@inafr.ru>.

1-3 June 2005, Washington, D.C. (USA) — Forum 2005 on the theme "Charting a Course for Relief and Development: Advancing the Millennium Development Goals and Other Global Commitments." Organized by InterAction (American Council for Voluntary International Action). Tel (202) 667-8227, fax (202) 667-8236, e-mail <ia@interaction.org>, website <www.interaction.org/forum2005>.

7–10 June 2005, Durban (South Africa) — 2nd South African AIDS Conference. Website <www.sa-aidsconference.com>.

20–24 June 2005, Johannesburg (South Africa) — Africa Rail 2005, bringing together African railway operators, investors, regulators, suppliers and governments to forge business relationships. Contact Toni Carroll, tel (27 11) 516 4038, e-mail <toni.carroll@terrapinn.co.za>, website <www.rail-world.com/2005/rail_za>.

21–24 June 2005, Baltimore (USA) — 2005 US-Africa Business Summit. This summit, the largest of its kind, strives to increase US private sector awareness of commercial opportunities in Africa. Contact Kathleen Wells, tel (202) 835-1117, fax (202) 263-3534, e-mail <kwells@africacncl.org>.

27–30 June 2005, Ota (Nigeria) — International Conference on Human Development, organized by Covenant University. Contact Rotimi Taiwo, tel (234) 803 4069746, e-mail <ferotai@yahoo.com>, website <www.covenantuniversity.com>.

5–7 July 2005, Oxford (UK) — Environmental Justice and Global Citizenship: Environments, Sustainability and Technologies. The fourth global conference of the Inter-Disciplinary.Net. Contact Rob Fisher, e-mail <rf@inter-disciplinary.net>, website <www.inter-disciplinary.net/ptb/ejgc/ejgc4/cfp.htm>.

6–8 July 2005, Perthshire (Scotland) — Group of Eight Summit. Website <www.g8.gov.uk>.

19–21 July 2005, UN Headquarters, New York (USA) — Global Conference: from Reaction to Prevention. The conference will address the role of civil society and NGOs in the prevention of armed conflicts. Contact: Guido de Graaf Bierbrauwer, tel (31 30) 242 7777, fax (31 30) 236 9268, e-mail <g.bierbrauwer@conflict-prevention.net>, website <www.gppac.net>.

WHAT HAS TAKEN PLACE

7–8 April 2005, Oaxaca (Mexico) — Designing and Implementing Rural Development Policies. Organized by Directorate for Public Governance and Territorial Development of the OECD. Contact Nicola Crosta, tel (33 1) 45 24 98 45, fax (33 1) 45 24 87 96, e-mail <nicola.crosta@oecd.org>, website <www.microrregiones.gob.mx/ocdeoaxaca/>.

11–13 April 2005, Dakar (Senegal) — 4th International Conference and Exhibition on Traditional Medicine, on the theme "Traditional Healing and HIV/AIDS." Contact Africa First, tel: (651) 646-4721, fax: (651) 644-3235, e-mail < info@africa-first.com>, website <www.africa-first.com>.

AFRICA BOOKS

The African Quest: The Transition from the OAU to AU and NEPAD Imperatives by Kinfe Abraham (Ethiopian International Institute for Peace and Development, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 2004; 714 pp; pb £29.95, $54.95)

L'Afrique et les Objectifs du Millénaire pour le Développement by Ahmed Rhazaoui, Luc-Joël Grégoire and Soraya Mellali (Economica, Paris, France, 2005; 635 pp; pb €25)

Agrodiversity: Learning from Farmers Across the World, eds. Harold Brookfield, Helen Parsons and Muriel Brookfield (UN University Press, Tokyo, Japan, 2003; 343 pp; pb $32)

HIPC Debt Relief: Myths and Reality, eds. Jan Joost Teunissen and Age Akkerman (FONDAD, The Hague, Netherlands, 2004; 145 pp; €12.50)

Business Ethics in Africa by Deon Rousouw (Oxford University Press, Oxford, UK, 2002; 180 pp; hb $19.95)

Un homme libre au Rwanda by Augustin Cyiza (Karthala, Paris, France, 2004; 218 pp; €18)

Global Citizens: Social Movements and the Challenge of Globalization by Marjorie Mayo (Zed Books, London, UK, 2004; 256 pp; hb £55, $25, pb £15.95, $25)

A Crisis of Governance: Zimbabwe by Jacob Chikuhwa (Algora Publishing, New York, US, 2004; 353 pp; pb $28.95, hb $35.98)

Reclaiming the Land: The Resurgence of Rural Movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America, eds. Sam Moyo and Paris Yeros (Zed Books, London, UK, 2005; hb £55, $85, pb £16.95, $27.50)

Diversity in Development: Reconsidering the Washington Consensus, eds. Jan Joost Teunissen and Age Akkerman (FONDAD, The Hague, Netherlands, 2004; 258 pp; €17.50)

De la postcolonie: Essai sur la imagination politique dans l'Afrique contemporaine by Achille Mbembe (Karthala, Paris, France, 2005; 300 pp; €25)

Economic Development and UN Reform: Towards a Common Agenda for Action by Carlos A. Magariños (UNIDO, Vienna, Austria, 2005; 191 pp; €25)

What Went Wrong with Africa by Roel Van Der Veen (KIT Publishers, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2004; 398 pp; pb $39.95)

Environment, Informal Sector and Factor Markets by Amoah Baah-Nuakoh (Woeli Publishing Services, Accra, Ghana, 2003; 328 pp; pb £18.95, $36.95)

Ethnicity and Democracy in Africa, eds. Bruce Berman, Dickson Eyoh and Will Kymlicka (Ohio University Press, Ohio, USA, 2004; 336 pp; hb $59.95, pb $28.95)

L'ONU dans la crise en Sierra Leone: Les méandres d'une négociation by Jean-Marc Chataigner (Karthala, Paris, France, 2005; 200 pp; €18)

Globalization and the Southern African Economies, ed. Mats Lundahl (Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, Uppsala, Sweden, 2004; 128 pp; SEK140)

International Trade, Growth and Development by Pranab Bardhan (Blackwell Publishing, Malden, US, 2003; 320 pp; pb $44.95, hb $82.95)

Liberian Women Peacemakers: Fighting for the Right to Be Seen, Heard and Counted by African Women and Peace Support Group (Africa World Press, New Jersey, US, 2004; 100 pp; pb $19.95)

Mandela's World: the International Dimension of South Africa's Political Revolution, 1990-99 by James Barber (James Currey Publishers, Oxford, UK, 2004; 214 pp; hb $44.95, pb $24.95)

The New Imperial Order: Indigenous Responses to Globalization by Makere Stewart-Harawira (Zed Books, London, UK, 2005; 288 pp; hb £55, $85, pb £16.95, $27.50)

The Reality of AID 2004: An Independent Review of Poverty Reduction and Development Assistance. Focus on Governance and Human Rights by Reality Aid (Zed Books, London UK, 2004; 272 pp; hb £50, $75)

The Regulation of the Power Sector in Africa: Attracting Investment and Protecting the Poor, eds. Edward Marandu and Dorcas Kayo (Zed Books, London, UK, 2004; 384 pp; hb £55, $85)

Le pétrole du Tchad: Rêve ou cauchemar pour les populations? by Martin Petry and Naygotimti Bambé (Karthala, Paris, France, 2005; 416 pp; €26)

AFRICA

IN BRIEF

US loses WTO appeal on cotton subsidies

The World Trade Organization in March issued a final ruling declaring that cotton subsidies paid to farmers in the US are in violation of international trade rules and depress world prices. The ruling came after an appeal by the US last year to a preliminary WTO finding in a case filed by Brazil. This is the first successful WTO challenge of a wealthy nation's domestic agricultural subsidies and it could force the US to lower the amounts of farm supports it pays for cotton and other crops. It could also influence a change in trade policies in other industrial nations, which currently pay an estimated $300 bn annually in agricultural subsidies.

Under the 1995 WTO Agreement on Agriculture, countries cannot increase their farm supports beyond amounts they paid in 1992. In its challenge, Brazil argued that the US violated this, costing the South American nation $600 mn in potential revenue. If the US fails to comply with the WTO ruling, Brazil may levy trade sanctions against it.

The ruling also marks a victory for African cotton-producing countries that have long blamed Northern subsidies for destroying the livelihoods of millions of farmers through unfair competition. Many developing countries have repeatedly called for the total elimination of agricultural subsidies at the ongoing "Doha round" of negotiations. Cotton producers Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali welcomed the ruling and urged the US to implement the decision quickly. The ruling "confirms that these subsidies are not fair and must be phased out in a very, very short time," said Mr. Samuel Amehou, Benin's WTO ambassador. The UN, World Bank and other agencies have long argued that reducing subsidies would greatly benefit the economies of developing countries. ■

UN AIDS envoys urge India to not restrict generics

In a highly unusual step, the UN special envoys for HIV/AIDS in Africa and in Asia and the Pacific, Mr. Stephen Lewis and Ms. Nafis Sadik, wrote a joint letter urging the Indian government not to adopt legislation threatening the global availability of generic anti-AIDS medicines. The letter, addressed to Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President Avul Pakir Jainulabdeen Abdul Kalam, came shortly before the parliament adopted legislation bringing India into compliance with World Trade Organization (WTO) rules on intellectual property.

"India's role in addressing the global AIDS pandemic has been critical," the envoys wrote. Because the old legislation permitted Indian drug manufacturers to produce and export inexpensive copies of costly patented anti-retroviral medications, "the lives of HIV-positive people throughout the developing world are now being sustained by quality generic drugs." As a result of India's decision to adopt the more restrictive WTO trade rules on drugs, the two senior UN representatives warned, "those lives are now in jeopardy."

The new legislation, adopted 23 March, exempts generic AIDS medicines now widely used in developing countries. The legislation could significantly raise prices for drugs currently under development, however, raising concerns about their availability to the poor. "Some people with HIV/AIDS will develop resistance to the first generation of AIDS drugs and will need newer treatments," noted Médecins Sans Frontières spokesperson Ellen 't Hoen. "But without Indian generic medicines, where will they get affordable medicines from?" ■

African NGOs seek to build their capacities

African non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are urging donors to channel more of their assistance to the continent through indigenous groups, **reports Nick Cater from Addis Ababa.** Representatives of hundreds of African NGOs, meeting in the Ethiopian capital at the end of 2004, called for at least 25 per cent of humanitarian aid to Africa to be channelled through local NGOs.

According to a researcher for Development Initiatives, a UK-based institute, between a quarter and a half of bilateral and UN aid now goes to Northern NGOs working in Africa, while only "tiny amounts" are directed through indigenous groups. At current aid levels, he estimates, adoption of the 25 per cent target would make available almost $700 mn.

The African NGOs also recommended that at least 10 per cent of the grants they receive go to "overhead," that is, personnel and other operating costs. Some donor agencies now allow only 5 per cent. NGO leaders warn that because of this restriction, grants often barely cover the cost of operational tasks in emergencies, leaving little for future investments or to meet essential organizational needs, from training to computing.

Dr. Dawit Zawde, president of Africa Humanitarian Action, which is active in more than a dozen countries and co-sponsored the meeting with the African Union, says that donors expect a lot from African NGOs, yet do not seem to trust them with sufficient resources. "Africa has long been depicted as a hopeless zone of conflict, famine and displacement that lacks capacity to respond adequately to crisis," he notes. "This perception supports an aid paradigm that marginalizes and erodes local capacity, casting African actors as sub-contractors to their international counterparts."

The African NGOs decided to launch a think-tank and research unit, the Centre for Humanitarian Action, to help groups improve their efficiency and find additional resources, including from aid, service fees and contributions from the African diaspora.

Part of the campaign's inspiration has come from the recent capacity-building efforts of the African Union, New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) and UN Economic Commission for Africa, explains Dr. Dawit. "Strong indigenous organizations are essential for an effective humanitarian response in Africa. Empowerment of African NGOs is, therefore, a critical goal, especially given the new vision of Africa's regeneration, in which Africa takes the lead in defining its problems and finding solutions."

Digital 'solidarity' fund launched

A plan, proposed by Senegalese President Abdoulaye Wade, to solicit donations to finance the development of information technology in poor nations was officially launched in March in Geneva, the first city to sign up to the plan. The Digital Solidarity Fund has so far received backing from Algeria, France, Nigeria and Senegal. It will raise money by collecting voluntary contributions of 1 per cent of public information communication technology (ICT) procurement contracts. In turn, donors will be able to use the label, "Digital Solidarity."

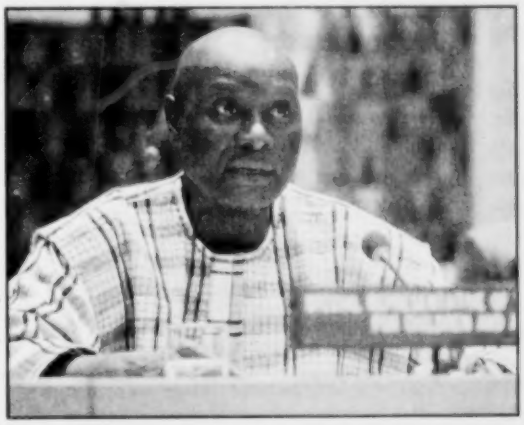
The fund should be seen "as a concrete manifestation of our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals," said UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. "It can help harness the potential of ICTs to empower poor and marginalized people." He said the initiative would contribute to fighting poverty and bridging the gap in technological development between rich and poor countries. "The use of information and communication technologies is shrinking distances, fostering new approaches to existing challenges and bringing dramatic changes in the economic, social and cultural realms," Mr. Annan said.

International Telecommunication Union Secretary-General Yoshio Utsumi said the creation of the fund confounded the sceptics. "Without the strong political will of the African heads of state involved in the process, it would not have been possible." Presidents Wade, Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria and Abdelaziz Bouteflika of Algeria attended the launch. ■

UN sanctions to penalize use of child soldiers

UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has urged the Security Council to impose targeted sanctions on governments, armed groups and individuals using child soldiers. In his annual report on the issue to the council in February, Mr. Annan noted that 54 parties and countries are using more than 250,000 children as soldiers, thereby violating international law. Sanctions could include arms embargoes, travel bans on leaders and a "restriction on the flow of financial resources to the parties concerned," Mr. Annan said. Countries where child soldiers are used include Burundi, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Somalia, Sudan, Colombia, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka and Uganda.

The report, said UN Special Representative for Children and Armed Conflict Olara Otunnu, marks a turning point by "transforming words into deeds." It represents "the launch of a comprehensive compliance regime to ensure the protection of millions of children who have been brutalized in situations of conflict." The world community now needs to ensure that standards on protecting children are enforced, he added.



UN / K. Chung

Action is needed to protect children from military conscription, says UN Under-Secretary-General Olara Otunnu.

Children are used as combatants, porters, spies and sex slaves, Mr. Otunnu explained. "Tens of thousands of girls are being subjected to rape and other forms of sexual violence, including as a deliberate tool of warfare," he said. "Abductions are becoming widespread and brazen, as we have witnessed for example in northern Uganda, Nepal and Burundi."

Mr. Otunnu, whose office prepared the report, also cited some good news: compared to previous years, the number of child soldiers has fallen. The countries where the overall situation of children has improved include Afghanistan, Angola, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Liberia, Sierra Leone and East Timor. ■

Africa leads world measles decline

The world is on its way to meeting the goal of cutting the number of deaths from measles by half by the end of 2005, according to a report released in March by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF). The agencies reported that globally, the number of deaths from measles, a highly contagious viral disease, had dropped by 39 per cent between 1999 and 2003, from 873,000 to 530,000.

The biggest reduction, of 46 per cent, occurred in Africa, the continent most affected by the disease.

"Progress of this magnitude is remarkable," said WHO Director General Lee Jong-wook. "I am certain that with increased commitment from governments and further support from the international community, even more can be accomplished."

The report attributes progress to the willingness of governments to fully implement a WHO/UNICEF strategy to extend immunization to at least 90 per cent of all local districts. The strategy also focuses on ensuring that every child from nine months to 14 years of age receives a follow-up shot, designed to reach those who missed the first round of vaccinations and boost immunity for the 10–15 per cent of children who do not respond to the initial dose. As a result of these efforts, more than 350 million children across the world were immunized from 1999 to 2003.

"We now have the opportunity to replicate this successful method as we tackle other child killers, such as malaria," said UNICEF Executive Director Carol Bellamy. Only a decade ago, measles killed as many as one million children a year around the world. Many of the 30 million who survived were left blind or with complications such as brain damage and other disabilities. ■

AFRICA WATCH

COMMISSION FOR AFRICA

Proposals for G-8 agenda

The Commission for Africa, set up by UK Prime Minister Tony Blair last year to galvanize common action by rich countries on Africa, released its final report in March. "In terms of analysis and in terms of diagnosis, [the report] has done very, very well," Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo said. "The challenge is putting the recommendations into action."

The report contains about 100 frequently raised but yet-to-be implemented proposals. These include cancelling debt, doubling aid, removing rich country trade subsidies and promoting good governance in Africa. It also points out the role developed countries play in facilitating corruption in Africa. The commission comprised 17 members, nine of them from Africa. They included Tanzanian President Benjamin Mkapa, UK Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown and the executive director of the UN Economic Commission for Africa, Mr. K.Y. Amoako.

The release of the report comes at a time when the UK is chairing the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialized countries. The proposals are set to be put to the G-8 summit in July, to be held in Scotland. "When G-8 leaders meet in July," commented Commonwealth Secretary-General Don McKinnon, "they must go beyond promises and expressions of goodwill. They must, quite simply, convert this report into action." ■

POLIO

Vaccination drive targets 100 million

The first round of a massive polio immunization drive targeting 100 million children was carried out simultaneously in 22 African countries on 25 February. The ambitious effort, part of a global campaign to eradicate the crippling disease, includes the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan and Côte d'ivoire, where conflict has severely disrupted public health services. A second coordinated national immunization day was scheduled for 9 April. The cost of the African immunization campaign, which will continue thorough 2006, is estimated at $275 mn.

The 17-year, $4 bn global campaign suffered a major setback last year, when government and religious officials in northern Nigeria halted polio immunizations amid allegations that the vaccine was tainted. Polio has spread from Nigeria to countries as distant as Saudi Arabia and Botswana, reinfecting many previously polio-free countries and requiring additional immunization programmes. ■

REGIONAL COOPERATION

Hydro-electric plans for Congo

In late February the South African power company Eskom Holdings announced plans to build a massive $50 bn hydro-electric power generating facility on the Congo River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. When completed, noted Eskom Chairman Reuel Khoza, the Inga Rapids project would have a capacity of 40,000 megawatts a year and generate enough electricity to power Africa's industrialization and generate hard currency through sales of power to southern Europe. "Africa urgently needs energy to lift its people out of poverty," Mr. Khoza told world environment ministers at UN Environment Programme headquarters in Nairobi. The proposal was an old one, he noted, but had gained political momentum as a key part of the energy programme of the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

The dam, which is still in the planning stages, will not block the river's natural flow, as conventional dams would. A more environment-friendly "run of river" design will be used instead, in which water is routed from the river to a series of power-generating turbines and then channelled back into the river. When completed, the project would increase Africa's overall electric-generating capacity by 40 per cent. Environmental groups have nevertheless questioned the ecological impact of the project and note that private investors, who are expected to provide the bulk of the financing, may be unwilling to risk large investments in a country still ravaged by war. ■

APPOINTMENTS

UN

Ms. Ann Veneman *will take office as the new executive director of the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) on 1 May. She was appointed in January by UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan to succeed the out-going Executive Director Carol Bellamy. Ms. Veneman has extensive experience in agricultural and food issues in the US, at various times managing agricultural programmes in California, serving as deputy under-secretary of agriculture for international affairs and commodity programmes and, in the four years up to her appointment, as secretary of the US Department of Agriculture.*

Ms. Amina Mohamed *has been elected as the first woman to chair the General Council of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the organization's highest decision-making body between biannual ministerial conferences. At the time of the election, she was Kenya's permanent representative to the WTO, and was known as an active campaigner on trade-related development issues and on access to essential medicines. She has also chaired the WTO's dispute settlement and trade policy review bodies, has coordinated the work of the African Group both at the WTO and the Human Rights Commission and has served as president of the UN Conference on Disarmament.*

WHO

The World Health Organization (WHO) Executive Board has appointed ***Dr. Luis Gomes Sambo*** *as its regional director for Africa, for a five-year term beginning 1 February 2005. He succeeds Dr. Ebrahim Malick Samba, who has retired. A national of Angola, Dr Sambo has been active in public health for more than 25 years, including as Angola's vice-minister of health. He joined the WHO in 1989, serving variously as its representative in Guinea-Bissau and its Africa regional director of programme management.*

The UN Secretary-General has appointed ***Mr. Pierre Schori*** *of Sweden to succeed Mr. Albert Tévoédjré as his special representative for Côte d'Ivoire, effective 1 April 2005. Mr. Schori served as Sweden's permanent representative to the UN in 2000-2004. Previously, he served as Sweden's minister for international development cooperation and was a member of the European Parliament.*